

Explore the Bible Series for Feb. 26: Seek to commend, encourage one another

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Seek to commend, encourage one another

• *Romans 16:1-7, 17-20, 25-27*

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When I was in seminary, I dreamed of being in a church of 20-somethings. At the time, this was Generation X, the generation reacting to their “spoiled” boomer parents (just a description, not meant to offend anyone.)

This was not what the professors were teaching at Southwestern. My professors, instead, showed that a faithful New Testament church is multigenerational. Remember, love relates, and God is love. Love does not break relationships except in extreme circumstances

A general perception of the Apostle Paul is that he seems to be more prophet than merciful, yet he gives some very practical advice for relating to one another. This is someone who seems to be more committed to relating to one another than easily giving up (his relationship with John

Mark an obvious exception.) In Romans and Colossians, he says to bear with each other—be patient. Look at some practical ways he says to relate.

Commend others (Romans 16:1-7)

Paul thinks so highly of Phoebe, a woman of obvious ministry ability, that he sends her to Rome. The ministry she will give to the Roman church will doubtless strengthen it, so he tells them, “give her help.” Likewise, the believers in Rome—Priscilla, Aquila, Epenetus and Mary—also are a help and encouragement to Paul.

Christians may not thank others or bless them publicly enough. Recognizing people is relating to them appropriately. People need feedback and encouragement, doing so builds partnership and trust.

Caution others (Romans 16:17-18)

There are those Paul said not to tolerate. In general terms, Paul says to stay away from those who cause division and put up obstacles to obedience. He has spoken previously about bearing with each other and humbly putting away rights when there are differences of opinion about “disputable matters” (Romans 14:1).

Here the matters are doctrinal divisions or instances of selfish sabotage, either of which place obstacles to walking together as brothers and sisters. Paul seems to indicate these people operate from selfish and sinful hearts. He says to avoid them.

There are times when Christians will relate to people best when we stay away from them. This must be done carefully, not hastily—deliberately out of a humble heart.

Encourage others (Romans 16:19-20)

Paul has a quick word about obedience. He has given so much teaching and

practical application showing love and humility; he now encourages them to resist becoming battle-hardened. Paul says to be more familiar with good things than simply streetwise. God would soon give them victory, so they should be hoping and praying for the grace of the Lord Jesus in the meantime. Relating to people appropriately means we encourage people along the way.

Point others to God (Romans 16:25-27)

Finally, Paul talks in the form of a doxology about the gospel, revealed from heaven through prophets, so all nations will believe and recognize Christ as Lord.

Relating to people appropriately means recognizing where they are in God's redemption plan. How can a person relate appropriately to the church without the personal view that God is in Christ reconciling the world to himself? Now he gives into our hands the message of reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5:19-20).

Relating to others is the heart of what Jesus meant when he said, "Do not judge." Judgment is final. It is saying, "God is finished with you." Jesus offers another option. After removing the plank from our own eyes, "you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye" (Luke 6:42). This is staying engaged with people and wanting the best for them, even if they do you harm. Relating appropriately means wanting God's best for people.

Discussion questions

- *How do Christians commend or fail to commend people for good service? What would help us do a better job?*
- *How does the church typically relate to divisive members who put up obstacles?*

- *Who needs encouragement as they are struggling forward in faith?*
- *Who is in the midst of succeeding but needs that extra, timely encouragement?*
- *Do you know of someone who is outside the view of the church needing to be encouraged to come to Jesus?*



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